SEMIRAMIS:

A

TRAGEDY.

Translated from the FRENCH of

M. De VOLTAIRE.

——Prima eſt hæc ultio
Quod ſe judice nemo nocens abſolvitur.

Juv.

——*Murder, though it has no tongue,*
Will ſpeak with moſt miraculous organs.

SHAKESPEAR.

DUBLIN:

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M DCC LX.

Dramatis Perſonæ.

MEN.

ARZACES, otherwiſe NINIAS.

ASSUR, a prince of the family of Belus.

OROES, the High-prieſt.

OTANES, a miniſter, devoted to SEMIRAMIS.

MITRANES, the friend of ARZACES.

CEDAR, a follower of ASSUR.

WOMEN.

SEMIRAMIS, Queen of the eaſt.

AZEMA, a princeſs of the family of Belus.

Guards, Magi, Slaves, Attendants.

BRITISH MUSEUM

SEMIRAMIS:

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Scene represents a vista of considerable length, at the end of which, the palace of Semiramis appears. Gardens are seen raised above the palace: the temple of the Magi occupies the right, and a mausoleum, adorned with obelisks, stands opposite to it on the left. Two slaves are seen bearing a casket at a distance.

ARZACES *and* MITRANES.

ARZACES.

MITRANES, yes, kind fate's directing hand
Restores *Arzaces* to his native soil,
And to the arms of thee his faithful friend.
Heavens! how the powerful genius of the queen

Diſplays on every ſide magnificence!
What wonderous art has form'd this channel's depth,
To which Euphrates with ſurprize conveys
The needful tribute of his watry ſtore?
This temple, glory of the architect,
Theſe hanging gardens rais'd in ambient air,
This ſolemn ſhrine where *Ninus* lies interr'd
For ever ſhall proclaim the queen's renown.
Hither her high beheſts invite my ſteps;
Tho' eaſtern kings at awful diſtance bow,
Proud to behold her greatneſs from afar,
Semiramis admits me to her preſence.

Mit. Beware, *Arzaces*, Fame is oft deceitful:
This object of your wonder may excite
Grief and compaſſion when beheld too nigh.

Arz. Say you?

Mit. Semiramis, a prey to her affliction,
Imparts to all the court her inward woe:
Each ſoul is ſeiz'd with ſympathizing horror:
Sometimes with ſcreams of grief ſhe fills the air,
Anon dejected, languiſhing, unquiet,
She ſeems to fly from ſome vindictive God,
And falls upon her knees in this receſs,
Sacred to night, to ſilence and to death:
Gloomy retreat, by mortals ne'er explor'd,
Where *Ninus'* royal aſhes lie intomb'd;
With haggard air, with timid ſteps and ſlow
She often to the ſepulchre approaches,
And ſtrikes her aching boſom bath'd with tears.
Breaking the horrid ſilence, oft her lips
Articulate the names of ſon and huſband:
The gods ſhe oft invokes; the angry gods
With unrelenting rigour hear her cries.

Arz.

Arz. Say from what ſource ſprings miſery ſo dire?
Mit. The ſad effect is felt; the cauſe unknown.
Arz. How long has thus vindictive Heaven purſued her?
Mit. Since firſt ſhe ſent for you to come to court.
Arz. Since firſt ſhe ſent for me?
Mit. My lord, when Babylon with joy reſounded
And blazing fires were kindled by your conqueſts;
When hoſtile ſtandards hung aloft, diſplay'd
Trophies of ſtates your conquering arm ſubdu'd;
When with ſurpriſe Euphrates' ſtream beheld
Shine forth with luſtre on his fertile banks,
The beauteous *Azema*, my ſovereign's niece;
To whoſe illuſtrious veins the blood of *Belus*
Has been tranſmitted by a race of kings:
The majeſty of Babylon's proud queen
Even then was blaſted in thoſe days of triumph,
And languiſh'd in the time of public joy.
Arz. From whate'er cauſe this trouble may take riſe,
Azema ſure is innocent—one look
Of that enchanting fair-one might appeaſe
The angry gods——no evil can ariſe
From ſuch a model of tranſcendent goodneſs:
But ſure, *Semiramis* that rules the helm,
Cannot be always thus o'erwhelm'd with grief.
Mit. Sometimes her mind heaves off its load of grief,
And ſhines conſeſt in all its force and luſtre;
I recognize that fierce ambitious ſoul,
To which the greateſt kings on earth ador'd,
Are not by adulation's voice compar'd.
But when ſhe to her inward anguiſh yields,
Whilſt her hands looſely hold the reins of empire,
Then haughty *Aſſur*, inſolent, and fierce,

Beneath

Beneath his yoke makes all the palace groan,
And rules deſpotic with an iron rod.
This ſecret of the ſtate, the throne's diſgrace,
As yet, has been confin'd within our walls:
Abroad we're envied, but at home we groan.

Arz. From hence what leſſons may frail mortals learn!
How happineſs is daſh'd with odious grief!
Alas, an equal anguiſh tears my breaſt,
At diſtance from that ſage, whoſe prudent hand
Had ſerv'd to guide my wandering ſteps at court,
A prey to all the paſſions of raſh youth;
Abandon'd to my pride and my preſumption,
I ſail amidſt ſurrounding rocks and ſhoals,
No friendly pilot to direct my courſe.

Mit. Like you I mourn'd that venerable man;
Phradates was my friend, I weep his loſs;
Him *Ninus* lov'd, and to his guardian care
Entruſted *Ninias* his only ſon,
In whom the kingdom's hopes were all concenter'd.
One day ſaw ſon and ſire deſcend to death,
To voluntary exile then he went,
But to his exile you your greatneſs owe,
By him to honour train'd, in glory's field
New provinces you've added to our empire
And on a level with the greateſt monarchs;
To your own worth you owe your eminence.

Arz. What fate prepares me here? I'm yet to know.
Oft have th' enſanguin'd plains of Arbazan
Beheld ſucceſs attend upon my arms,
And I can boaſt my ſhare of martial fame;
When Oxus' diſtant banks beheld your queen
Triumphant o'er a hundred vanquiſh'd nations,
That bow'd ſubmiſſive and receiv'd her laws;

She from her lofty car has deign'd to ſhed
A ray of glory on my early youth;
But who can truſt to fickle fortune's ſmiles,
Hemm'd round with glory in th' intented field?
Soldiers may be neglected in a court.
My dying father told me, "Son, your all
"Muſt now depend upon the common cauſe:"
And to my hands this precious pledge he gave,
Preſerv'd with care, remote from eyes prophane:
To the high-prieſt I muſt deliver it,
Its conſequence is known to none but him,
To him I muſt apply to know my fate,
'Tis he muſt to *Semiramis* preſent me.

Mit. To court he ſeldom comes: obſcure, unknown,
He lives devoted to religion's care,
From fear and from ambition both exempt,
The temple, not the palace he frequents.
He ne'er with kingly pride aſpir'd to place
The prieſt's tiara by the diadem.
Grandeur he ſhuns, and is the more rever'd:
I to his preſence ever find acceſs,
In ſecret I'll apprize him that you're come,
E'er on the world ſol brighter light beſtows,
In private here you ſhall confer with him.

SCENE II.

Arz. ſolus. To what am I by heaven's high will ordain'd?
Why on his death-bed did my aged ſire
To this religious dome direct my ſteps?
What ſervice can Chaldean gods deſire
From me a ſoldier bred to war's alarms,
From me by love's almighty power enſlav'd:

But

But whence that diſmal voice? that ſcream of woe?

[*Groans are heard from the bottom of the tomb of* Ninus.]

A cry from yonder vaulted manſion ſent,
Congeals my blood and ſhakes my ſoul with horror:
'Tis ſaid that here the ghoſt of *Ninus* haunts——
Amazement ſeizes me, the cry redoubles,
Oh ſacred, gloomy dwelling, royal ſhade,
Oh awful voice divine, what ſhould I do!

SCENE III.

ARZACES, *the High-Prieſt* OROES, *High-Prieſt's followers*, MITRANES.

MITRANES *to the High-Prieſt.*

Arzaces to your ſacred hands, my lord,
Preſents that pledge you've waited for ſo long.

Arz. Oh ſacred pontiff of Chaldea's god,
Hear the laſt will of my expiring ſire,
My ſire, whoſe eyes theſe hands have lately cloſed!
You lov'd him in his life——

Oro. Undaunted youth,
'Tis not ſo much the order of your ſire,
As the high will of an all-ruling God
That brings you now to my rejoicing ſight.
Still in my memory *Phradates* lives,
The ſire I lov'd, and I muſt love the ſon.
Where is that precious pledge his will conſigns me?

Arz. Behold them here.

[*The ſlaves give the coffer to two Magi, who lay it upon an altar.*]

OROES *opens the coffer and bending towards it with reſpect, delivers himſelf as follows.*

Do I then touch you, oh! you precious relicks?

And

And do my lips preſs thoſe ſad monuments
That make my aged eyes o'erflow with tears,
Whilſt my lov'd friend's idea you recall?
Retire from hence you Magi, you *Mitranes*,
Take care that none of the prophane approach.
[*The Magi retire.*
Behold the ſeal, to whoſe auguſt impreſſion,
The laws of *Ninus* erſt their ſanction ow'd:
The letter written by his dying hand
When death had chill'd his nerves, here meets my ſight;
Adore this diadem that bound his brows;
This ſword is deſtin'd to revenge his death,
This ſword that to our monarch's yoke reduc'd
Perſia, and Media, inſtrument too weak
Againſt vile treaſon and the poiſon's rage,
Whoſe mortal venom and whoſe ſure effect—
Arz. What do I hear, ye gods—
Oro. Theſe ſecrets dire
Darkneſs profound ſtill veils from human ſight.
The voice of *Ninus'* blood cries from the ground,
The gods have call'd for vengeance but in vain.
Arz. Oh! think what terror ſeiz'd my awe-ſtruck ſoul,
E'en from the jaws of yonder ſepulchre
A frightful groan aſſail'd my liſt'ning ears.
Oro. This ſound of death is royal *Ninus'* voice.
Arz. Twice have they pierc'd my ſhudd'ring ſoul with horror.
Oro. They call for vengeance—
Mit. Ninus has a right
To vengeance, but whoſe arm muſt ſtrike the blow?
Oro. The parricides whoſe impious hands depriv'd
Afflicted mortals of ſo good a king,
Their curſed treaſon carefully conceal'd;

Impenetrable darkneſs hides it from us.
With eaſe the eyes of mortals they've deceiv'd,
But they can ne'er eſcape that piercing ſight
That at one glance pervades the univerſe.

Arz. Oh, could my feeble hand revenge his death!
This fatal tomb, I know not why, conveys
Aſtoniſhment and horror to my ſoul;
May I conſult the manes of the king?

Oro. Approach it not my ſon, the voice ſevere
Of awful oracles forbids acceſs
To this abode of death; by angry gods
'Tis guarded, and by vengeance fenced round.
With patience wait till awful juſtice come:
The hour is near, blood ſhall for blood atone,
More I am not permitted to reveal;
I oft with care conſult the will divine
Which now inſpires, and now witholds its light.
I have declar'd what heaven imparts—beware
Leaſt by a look or geſture you betray
A ſecret which the God I ſerve reveals.
The glory of that God, and Aſia's fate
Depend upon your prudence—Magi rever'd,
Under the altar place this ſacred pledge.

[*The gate of the palace opens, and guards ſurround it.*
Aſſur *appears with his followers on the other ſide.*]

The palace gates are open'd—you behold
Aſſur ſurrounded with a courtly crowd
That cringes humbly, and adores his power.
The gods inſtruct us greatneſs to deſpiſe,
When they confer it on ſo bad a man.

Arz. Is that the tyrant?

Oro. When the ſhades of night
Extend their darkneſs o'er theſe guilty walls

In

In preſence of the gods we will confer.

Arz. Fear them, e'en now their eyes are fix'd upon thee.

SCENE IV.

Arzaces *appears on the front of the theatre with* Mitranes.

Aſſur *is ſeen at one ſide with* Odar *and his followers.*

Arz. How much this tale of woe affects my mind!
How horrid are the ſecrets of this court!
By poiſon then the royal *Ninus* died,
And well I ſee this *Aſſur* is ſuſpected.

Mitranes, *approaching* Arzaces.

Aſſur from ſacred kings derives his birth,
To his high ſtation deference is due:
The queen reſpects him, he by all is fear'd,
To *Aſſur* you may bend without diſgrace.

Arz. To impious *Aſſur* ſtain'd with *Ninus'* blood!

Aſſur *to* Cedar *at a diſtance.*

And is *Arzaces* then at Babylon?
Without my order, dares he thus approach?

Arz. Inſulting tyrant!

Aſſ. What ſtrange motive——ſay,
Makes you abandon thus the tented field?
The banks of Oxus why do you forſake?

Arz. By the queen's order I appear at court.

Aſſ. The queen then ſent for you——

Arz. She did, my lord.

Aſſ. And know'ſt thou not my order is requir'd,
E'er thou can'ſt gain admittance to the throne?

Arz. My lord, I knew it not, and ſhould have deem'd,
If it were ſo, the diadem diſgrac'd,
A ſoldier's frankneſs may perhaps offend.
To feats of arms inur'd on Scythia's plains;
I could not learn to know, but ſerve the court.

Aſſ. Tho' inexperienc'd, you may learn from time,
But ſay, what would you with *Semiramis*?
I only can admit you to the throne.

Arz. The honour to obey her's all I aſk;
An honour to my valour juſtly due.

Aſſ. Thy ſoul at ſomething higher does aſpire,
Thy aims preſumptuous, fain thou would'ſt conceal.
Your love for *Azema* I know——

Arz. 'Tis true,
I prize that fair-one's heart above an empire;
And my profound reſpect, my faithful love—

Aſſ. You know not whom you thus inſult, bold youth,
Would'ſt thou aſſociate Sarmatia's race
With blood of heroes and of demi-gods?
Dare not raſh youth to carry to the queen
The inſolent propoſal now you make,
Elſe ſhall your raſhneſs ſoon my vengeance feel.

Arz. My ſoul could never yet by threats be ſcar'd,
This moment I will haſten to the queen.
Whatever rights and power you here may have,
You can't inſult a ſoldier who has ſerv'd
The queen and empire, nay, has ſerv'd yourſelf.
This boldneſs may ſurprize you and diſpleaſe;
Who with preſumption and with pride elate
Would make me bend and crouch beneath your yoke.

Aſſ. E'er long raſh youth I'll make thee know the price
With which audacious ſubjects are repaid.

Arz. 'Tis what thou may'ſt be taught as well as I,

SCENE

SCENE V.

Semiramis *appears on the lower end of the ſtage, leaning upon her women:* Otanes *her confidant advances towards* Aſſur.

ASSUR, ARZACES, MITRANES.

Otanes *to* Arzaces.

Depart, ſir, for the queen, a prey to grief,
Shuns every eye, and chuſes ſolitude;
Reſpect the anguiſh of her grieving ſoul.
Ye gods reſtore her to her peace of mind.

Arz. Kind heaven with pity look upon her woe.

[*Exit* Arzaces.

Aſſur *to one of his Followers.*

Let's quit the place, and each expedient try
To make the beſt of her inquietude.

[Semiramis *advances to the front of the ſtage.*]

Otanes *to* Semiramis.

Oh queen recall the vigour of your ſoul,
Let not your eyes with horror ſhun the light.

Sem. When ſhall thy ſhades, oh death! enwrap theſe eyes;
Theſe eyes which with unceaſing tears o'erflow?

[*She walks in agitation about the ſtage, and thinks ſhe ſees the ghoſt of* Ninus.]

Ye yawning gulphs be clos'd, thou phantom dire,
Or ceaſe to threaten or deſtroy at once:
Arzaces coming, when may I expect?

Ota. Arzaces, Madam, e'er the riſing ſun
Arriv'd and waits your pleaſure now at court.

Sem. That voice celeſtial, or infernal howl,
That adds new horror to the ſhades of night,
Apprizes me that when *Arzaces* comes,

My

My heart-felt pangs at length ſhall find an end.

Ota. Let then a gleam of joy diſpel thoſe woes,
Hope in the gods who come to your relief.

Sem. Arzaces ſeems the meſſenger of joy:
Hope at his name revives within my ſoul,
And my crime weighs leſs heavy on my heart.

Ota. Baniſh its image ever from your mind;
Think of the glory of your better days,
Forget the happy, or unhappy hour
When that deſtructive union was diſſolv'd,
Ninus excluding you from bed and throne,
Had in your ruin Babylon involv'd,
The earth and Babylon alike rejoice
That ſuch a purpoſe did not take effect.
Your works and your exploits for fifteen years
Have been applauded and admir'd by men:
The barren deſert you have fertile made,
The fierceneſs of the ſavage tam'd by laws:
Arts in our cities at your voice reviv'd:
Theſe monuments, the wonders of the world,
The acclamations of this powerful ſtate
Bear witneſs to your glory, and proclaim
Your worth aloud before the thrones divine.
In fine, had heaven with horror view'd the deed,
Had *Ninus'* death appear'd ſo great a crime,
Would *Aſſur* proudly here defy its wrath?
The guilt of *Aſſur* far ſurpaſſes yours:
But tho' his hand prepar'd the deadly draught,
He lives ſecure, a ſtranger to your fears.

Sem. Our ſtation and our duties differ'd much,
My ſacred tie adds horror to my crime.
My guilt's of ſuch a dye, that I am forc'd
To give in evidence againſt myſelf.

I thought

I thought the gods incens'd at ſuch a crime
Sufficiently had puniſh'd me: I thought
That my ſon's loſs might have aton'd for all:
That all my uſeful labours, my ſucceſs,
Laſting reſpect had to my crown procured.
But now this horrid phantom damps my heart,
Aſtoniſhing at once my eyes and ears.
Approaching ſlowly to the monument,
At diſtance I the fatal urn revere:
With trembling I invoke it; direful cries,
And piercing groans, in anſwer it returns;
My throbbing heart ſome great event forbodes,
Perhaps the hour of vengeance now draws nigh.

Ota. But is it ſure that this infernal ſpectre
Comes from the dreary manſions of the dead?
When mortals think fate hovers o'er their heads,
A thouſand phantoms ſcare their frighted ſouls:
Objects of fancy then they realize,
And ſtart at the creation of the brain.

Sem. Theſe eyes have ſeen it, 'tis no viſion vain,
Proceeding from the heat-oppreſſed powers:
Sleep that on downy pinions fled my eyes,
Could not miſlead my waking ſoul with dreams.
Whilſt my cares kept me watching; near my bed
I heard a voice pronounce *Arzaces'* name.
With joy I heard his name: you know my heart,
My heart which bloody *Aſſur*'s fierceneſs wounds.
When I behold the partner of my crime,
My ſtartled conſcience flying in my face
Upbraids me that I ſpotted it for him:
I ſhudder at his view, the deed that binds us
Riſes in all its horrors to my ſoul:
I wiſh—but ſhould I in my preſent grief,

By a new crime revenge the crime that's paſt,
I muſt oppoſe *Arzaces* to his pride,
T' enſlave me he ambitiouſly aſpires.
Arzaces fill'd my breaſt with peace—but then
Even in the moments that I taſted joy,
Sudden the meſſenger of death appear'd,
All ſmear'd with blood, and in his hand a ſword
Gleam'd terrible—methinks I ſtill behold him,
Still hear his voice, ah, wherefore does he come?
Comes he to puniſh me, or to defend?
Even then *Arzaces* at my court arriv'd,
And heaven then ſeem'd to promiſe me repoſe.
But ſtill to care and anguiſh I'm a prey,
And peace is ſtill a ſtranger to my ſoul.
I float 'twixt hope and terror, and my life
Is now too great a burden to be borne.
My preſent power, and all my glory paſt
Give freſh affliction to my tortur'd ſoul.
Still I with care my ſecret grief conceal'd,
With ſhame my terrors cover'd me; I fear'd
Of *Oroes* the ſage to aſk advice.
I thought that it would vilify the throne,
Nor car'd to ſhew in preſence of the gods,
The queen in terror ſtand before a prieſt.
But fear prevail'd in ſecret, and I ſent
Jove to conſult where Libia's plains extend;
As if the God who rules o'er heaven and earth,
Had to thoſe wilds remote, confin'd the truth!
The god who dwells in that obſcure receſs
My homage has receiv'd, and heard my fears;
His altars with my incenſe oft have blaz'd,
And with rich preſents often have been heap'd;
But oh, what preſents can atone for crimes!

SCENE

SCENE VI.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES, *and* MITRANES.

Mit. A prieſt from Memphis juſt arriv'd attends
Your royal pleaſure at the palace gates.
Sem. The criſis of my fate is then at hand.
Let's hence, and ſtrive to hide from ſubjects eyes
The trouble that degrades their hapleſs queen.
Go bid *Arzaces* enter, and once more
Repoſe to my afflicted heart reſtore.

ACT II. SCENE I.

ARZACES *and* AZEMA.

AZEMA.

TO thee, *Arzaces*, this vaſt empire owes
Its luſtre, and to thee I owe my freedom.
When Scythia's ſons, their loſſes to repair,
Pour'd numerous on us from their wild retreats;
When to their chains my ſire expiring left me,
You to their deſarts bore vindictive thunder;
You broke my bonds, and overthrew their hoſt;
My heart alone can recompence the favour.
I'm yours, but love will ſure deſtroy us both.
Your open heart, alas! too fondly thought
That in this court reſpect, as in the field,
Would wait on your exploits, and grace your name,
That without danger you might be ſincere,
And act the lover's and the hero's part.
Aſſur you brave, the tyrant you ſhould know,
Here he is lord, he menaces aloud,

Remorſe he from his fatal power disjoins;
He is your rival, therefore dread his rage.

Arz. What does the tyrant lift his eyes to thee?

Aze. And think you then his fierce relentleſs heart
That hates all virtue, to no charm can yield?
That heart, to proud ambition's laws enſlav'd,
Knows tenderneſs, or can deſire to pleaſe.
As from Aſſyria's kings, I claim my birth,
He by our union hopes to prop his right,
And vindicate his title to the throne.
Were *Ninias'* ſelf to whom his royal ſire
Ninus had deſtin'd me in infancy;
Were the heir to this empire yet alive,
And ſhould he at my feet now lay his crown,
I ſwear by love, and by yourſelf I ſwear
I'd rather fly with you, than reign with him.
The ſavage plains of Scythia, whoſe rude climes
Reſound thy name, would be a bleſt retreat.
Thoſe deſarts where our love firſt took its riſe,
Would in my eyes even Babylon outſhine.
Perhaps the tyrant whom our love offends
Will not confine his rage to that revenge.
Replete with helliſh malice in his ſoul,
His harden'd heart can harbour ev'ry crime.
Your reputation has his envy rais'd,
He fears and hates you—

Arz. —And I hate him too,
Fear him I cannot, whilſt by you belov'd.
Secure in that I brave his utmoſt hate.
Betwen us two, the queen a ballance holds,
Admiſſion to her preſence ſoon I gain'd,
And ſhe receiv'd me with humanity,
Equal to the inſulting *Aſſur's* pride.

Before

Before her awful throne I kneel'd, ſhe rais'd
And call'd me the ſupport of Babylon.
Thus was I prais'd by her, who oft to kings,
Whom by her arms ſhe vanquiſh'd, laws preſcrib'd.
For me, ſhe from that envied height deſcended,
Which to the royal dignity ſhe ow'd.
Struck with her condeſcenſion I admir'd,
And thought her equal to the gods themſelves.

Aze. The menaces of *Aſſur* will be vain
If once our cauſe is by the queen eſpous'd.

Arz. Fill'd with a noble boldneſs, I prepar'd
To lay before her my aſpiring love,
Approv'd by you, oppos'd by haughty *Aſſur*.
Juſt then a prieſt of Egypt from the ſhrine
Of Ammon brought the anſwer of the god.
She open'd the decree with trembling hands,
Then with attention, fix'd on me her eyes,
Some tears ſhe dropp'd, then ſtarting ſuddenly,
With anguiſh overwhelm'd ſhe left the place.
'Tis ſaid her ſoul's a victor to deſpair,
And that the vengeance of the gods purſu'd her.
My heart weeps blood to ſee her thus, can heaven
That has protected her for fifteen years,
Now perſecute her with vindictive rage?
What has ſhe done, and how provok'd the gods?

Aze. The public talk is now of omens dire,
Of angry ghoſts, and of celeſtial wrath.
Semiramis to anxious care a prey,
For ſome time ſince neglects the government;
And much I fear'd, leaſt *Aſſur* ſhould have ſeiz'd
The helm, forſaken by her feeble hand.
But ſoon the awful preſence of the queen
Diſpell'd this trouble, and our peace reſtor'd.

If I know aught of courts, the haughty *Assur*
In ſecret is deteſted by the queen:
Their hate is mutual, but ſome hidden cauſe
Reſtrains it, nor permits to take effect.
Oft at his name I've ſeen the queen incens'd;
Her countenance has oft betray'd her mind,
Reſentment ſeem'd to have poſſeſs'd her heart;
But courts to change are ſubject, and a day
Can there produce a revolution ſtrange.
Return and ſpeak with her——

Arz. I go, but now
I know not if I can procure admittance.

Aze. I'll ſecond your deſign with all my power,
Your love is all my glory, and my pride:
To the queen's greatneſs all mortals bow,
And let the eaſt reſpect and fear her name.
I will not envy her whilſt lov'd by you:
Be her's the world, and mine *Arzaces'* heart.
Hence, *Aſſur* comes——

Arz. ——The villain! at his name
With honeſt rage my ſtartled ſoul recoils.

SCENE II.

ASSUR, ARZACES, AZEMA.

Aſſur *to* Arzaces.

With marks of honour you have been receiv'd,
Honour which kings have wiſh'd for, but in vain.
In ſecret with the queen you have conferr'd,
But know, *Arzaces*, your aſpiring claim
Inſults the throne, my honour, and the queen's.
Know *Azema* was deſtin'd for my bride,
To *Ninias* ſhe was offer'd, and the ſons
Of kings alone are worthy ſuch a match.
The prince's right is now devolved on me;

And

And *Aſſur* ſtands the neareſt to the throne.
Say, has the queen appriz'd you of the riſk
To which preſumption muſt expoſe your life?
That no reſpect can from my mind efface
The inſolence of your audacious love.

Arz. Reſpect, I know, is due to regal power,
And tho' my ſoul is free from abject fear,
Due deference to your rank I'll always pay.
Your claim to *Azema* depends upon
Your line illuſtrious, which from *Belus* ſprings.
Your private int'reſt, and the publick good,
Seem equally to call for ſuch an union.
Againſt theſe titles I ſhall one oppoſe,
Which muſt in reaſon's eye outweigh them both:
I love the princeſs, and this arm, my lord,
Her life protected, and her cauſe reveng'd.
And were I prone, like you, to boaſt my deeds,
I might aſſert, that I've ſuſtain'd her throne.
I go with zeal, her order to fulfil;
The queen and ſhe alone my duty claim.
The ſtate, perhaps, may groan beneath your power,
For monarchs often are the ſcourge of God;
But know, you're much deceiv'd if you ſuppoſe
Arzaces in the number of your ſlaves.

Aſſ. Vengeance will ſoon o'ertake and quell thy pride.

SCENE III.

ASSUR, AZEMA.

Aſſ. This inſolence can be no longer borne,
But may I freely now explain myſelf
Upon a ſubject that deſerves your ear.

Aze. Declare it, for I liſten——

Aſſ. Aſia ſoon
Shall ſee us both with envied greatneſs ſhine,

Inferior intereſts are below our care,
To regulate the world muſt be our taſk.
Semiramis her greatneſs has ſurviv'd,
And heaven has humbled her aſpiring ſoul;
That ſtar which long has dazzled mortal ſight,
Now ſets and loſes all its former luſtre.
The public murmurs, Babylon aloud
Demands an heir to prop the ſinking throne.
Let this ſuffice—Love ſhould not give us kings;
Not but your beauties ſtrike my raviſh'd eye,
I feel the power of all your heav'nly charms.
But ſure, the general welfare of the ſtate
Should not depend upon a look or ſmile.
A nobler ſentiment ſhould here prevail.
From the ſame race we both derive our birth,
We muſt unite, or elſe the world is loſt.
Theſe words, perhaps, may ſhock your tender youth,
But I addreſs the heroes and the kings,
The demi-gods from whom you are deſcended.
Long has a woman trampled on their greatneſs,
'Tis time you ſhould aſſert your royal birth,
And make the world forget *Semiramis*.

Aze. Be mine the care to vindicate my birth,
But henceforth name *Arzaces* with reſpect.
Semiramis is miſtreſs of my fate,
And 'tis my glory to obey her will.

SCENE IV.

ASSUR, CEDAR.

Aſſ. Gods! muſt the purpoſe of my ſoul be croſs'd?
Shall then a wayward child oppoſe my will?
Say, has ſucceſs attended your deſign?
And can you by your ſecret practices
Light up ſedition's torch throughout the land?

Ced.

Ced. My hopes are great—the people now begin
To ſhake off their reſpect—*Semiramis*
No longer is the object of their dread.
All loudly call for a ſucceſſor now,
And all who love their country, or who boaſt
Of public ſpirit, fix on you their choice.

Aſſ. Muſt then ambition ſtill produce new cares!
Have I for this ſlain *Ninus* and his ſon?
Muſt I for ever languiſh—never reach
That place to which my daring ſoul aſpires?
The queen depriv'd her ſpouſe of life—my rage
Surpaſs'd her fury, and I ſlew her ſon.
Ninias, who ſtood between me and the throne,
In ſecret was cut off by my command.
In vain, I try'd each art to win the queen;
In vain, I hop'd to gain her youthful ſoul
By all the power of flattery and perſuaſion.
Her haughty ſoul was proof againſt my wiles;
And to the empire of the world aſpir'd.
Worthy ſhe ſeem'd to rule the world; I own
Her merit, tho' I've ſuffer'd her diſdain.
I've ſeen her hold the reins of government,
And with ſuperior genius rule the realm,
Murmurs appeaſe, and inſurrections quell;
Armies direct, and regulate the ſtate.
That art which laws to fame itſelf preſcribes,
Made mankind to her empire homage pay.
The univerſe with awe beholds her ſtill:
The powerful charm of beauty too, conſpir'd
To make her laws reſpected through the world;
And when I to oppoſe her power preſum'd,
My friends were ſtruck with awe, and dropt their arms.
But times are chang'd; her greatneſs now declines,

Her genius now is check'd by adverſe fate.
Imaginary fears diſtract her ſoul;
Weakly to lying prieſts ſhe lends an ear,
And Egypt's ſuperſtitions ſhe adores.
Her incenſe and her vows fatigue the gods;
Like other mortals now ſhe learns to fear.
Semiramis muſt yield to adverſe fate,
Muſt to my wiſhes yield your charms divine;
Or by refuſing, make the realm rebel.
Dangers ariſe on ev'ry ſide around her,
But my aſpiring ſoul perhaps preſumes
Too much—perhaps you will not hear my vows.

Ced. If the queen yields, and names you her ſucceſſor,
Wherefore ſhould diffidence invade your ſoul?
Your union with the beauteous *Azema*
Is loudly call'd for by the ſtate—the realm
Can never hope to proſper till you reign.

Aſſ. With me alone the princeſs ſhould be match'd,
But wherefore is *Arzaces* call'd to court?
Why does *Semiramis* ſupport his pride?
I would have puniſh'd him—her hand retains
My lifted arm, nor lets me wreak revenge.
Tho' I'm a prince, no ſubjects own my reign,
I'm miniſter, but deſtitute of power,
Hemm'd round with glory I dependent live:
At once a miſtreſs, an audacious youth,
And lying prieſts conſpire againſt my peace:
Semiramis diſtruſts me, and her hate
Scarcely conceals, but ſtill my preſence flies;
But let th' ungrateful queen, beware, leaſt I,
Leaſt her accomplice ſhould revenge her crimes.

[*He prepares to go out.*

SCENE

SCENE V.

ASSUR, OTANES, CEDAR.

Ota. My lord, the queen commands you to attend,
With you ſhe means in ſecret to confer.

Aſſ. Her ſecret orders I'll with care obey,
Otanes, ſay, I wait her royal will.

SCENE VI.

ASSUR, CEDAR.

Aſſ. This ſudden change what cauſe may have produc'd?
Theſe three months paſt I've borne her deadly hate;
Her eyes have ſtill with horror ſhun'd my ſight,
She has not deign'd to ſpeak with me alone:
Our converſations which diſguſted her
Were interrupted by her ſudden fears,
And oft ſhe heard with inattentive ear:
What would ſhe tell me, what deſire to learn?
The queen approaches, go and wait my coming.

SCENE VII.

SEMIRAMIS, ASSUR.

Sem. It's time, my lord, I ſhould explain my heart,
Which long in ſecret has devour'd its grief.
My reign, perhaps, has not inglorious been:
Aſia, perhaps, and Babylon may place
Semiramis amongſt their greateſt kings.
Your hands have long ſuſtain'd the empire's weight;
I've liv'd victorious, abſolute, ador'd,
With incenſe to my power each altar blaz'd:
Thus too, ſecure and free from ev'ry fear,
I ſoon forgot to what I ow'd my ſtate,
By greatneſs blinded I forgot the gods:
The gods their juſtice now diſplay; I yield;
My power which long ſeem'd founded on a rock,
Now aſks a prop, and totters to its fall.

Aſſ. Madam, 'tis yours to finiſh your great work,
And in the womb of time foreſee events.
What clouds can overcaſt ſo bright a fame?
All earth obeys, then wherefore fear the gods?

Sem. In yonder urn repoſes *Ninus'* duſt,
And do you aſk the ſubject of my fear?

Aſſ. To find that you remember *Ninus* reign'd,
With a juſt indignation fills my ſoul.
Can you the anger of his manes fear,
Who fifteen years has ſlept in ſilent death?
E'er this, they had wreak'd their vengeance on your head
Had they the power, from the oblivious ſhades.
Raiſe not his ghoſt: my mind recoils appall'd,
And ſympathizing dread pervades my breaſt.
No longer to falſe oracles repair,
A heart reſolv'd propitiates the gods.
Muſt this ſtrange phantom you have ſeen to-day,
By fears begot, ſtill to new fears give birth?
No portents can affright th' undaunted ſoul:
Theſe are the bugbears of the populace,
By fraud invented—by the great deſpis'd;
But if ſome nobler, ſome more ſolid view
That ſoul enlightens, to vain fears a prey:
If *Ninus'* race you would eternalize,
If that high rank by *Azema* is claim'd——

Sem. On that account I come—the oracles,
And Babylon at once demand an heir.
My ſceptre's weight requires another hand,
And ſoon both heaven and earth ſhall be obey'd.
Aſſur, you know that my ambitious ſoul
Had made a vow never to ſhare the throne;
Whom I would marry, long I kept conceal'd:
When in my youth the people's voice, that voice

By

By many thought to be the voice of God,
Preſs'd me to give new ſovereigns to the world:
If any to that honour might pretend,
'Twas due to you, and you alone—but 'midſt
Your hopes you ſurely could not but have known
How much *Semiramis* diſdain'd a lord.
I ſhun'd this fatal tye, but ſtill I made you
Second on earth in glory, and in power.
My lord, I, without pride, may ſure affirm
You ſhould have been contented with that rank.
Heaven now declares itſelf and I obey,
Attentive hear its will, my orders mark.
" The empire ſhall renew its ancient luſtre,
" When kindling Hymen's torch anew: oh! queen,
" Unhappy mother, and too cruel wife,
" You have aton'd the murder'd *Ninus*' ghoſt."
The will divine is in theſe words explain'd.
I know your views, I know your policy,
You mean to form a party in the ſtate:
The blood you ſpring from, you'd againſt me turn,
A king from *Azema* and you might riſe;
You ſeek this marriage, ſhe perhaps conſents,
But 'tis not my deſign your rights ſhould blend,
And by uniting, arm againſt my own;
Such is my fix'd, irrevocable will.
Judge if the God, who perſecutes my peace,
Has quite depriv'd my ſenſes of their vigour;
From theſe my words know you *Semiramis*?
Cannot I ſtill my dignity ſuſtain?
To Babylon I ſoon will give a lord;
But whoſoe'er is honour'd with my choice,
Think not when married, I will ceaſe to reign.
Aſſemble ſtraight the princes, and the magi,

My liberty and empire to beſtow
Is the moſt ſolemn act of regal power.
Let all my ſubjects wait my will in ſilence.
My fate grows bright on this auſpicious day,
And wrath divine now ſeems almoſt appeas'd;
But by repentance it muſt be diſarm'd;
Believe me, that remorſe which you deſpiſe,
Is all the virtue criminals can boaſt:
Timid and weak you think me, know proud man,
Thoſe that are guilty, are the truly weak.
Such fear is no diſhonour to a crown,
Kings it becomes, and you ſhould learn to fear;
I'll ſhew you by example, 'tis not baſe
Humbly to bow before the angry gods.

SCENE VIII.

Aſſ. ſolus. What do I hear! what ſtrange deſigns are theſe!
Does fear or artifice inſpire her breaſt?
Thinks ſhe by yielding, to ſecure her power?
Would ſhe to thwart me, join her fate to mine?
I muſt no more to *Azema* pretend;
I then ſhall be the conſort of the queen.
What all my cares, and what our common crimes,
What all the homage I have paid her charms,
What my intrigues could never yet effect,
An oracle, a dream has brought about!
What unknown power o'er human kind preſides!
Yet I'm uncertain, let me ſee the queen,
Her reſolution ſeems precipitate,
A thouſand cares her anxious brow diſplays,
And ſudden changes ſhould ſuſpicion raiſe.

ACT III. SCENE I.

The theatre represents an apartment in the palace.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

SEMIRAMIS.

WHO wou'd have thought, *Otanes*, that the gods
Prepar'd to view me with propitious eyes?
And that they terrify'd but to forgive!
Deſtruction's gulph is by their mercy clos'd,
Th' uplifted thunder-bolt they have laid down:
Arzaces they have brought, have chang'd my fate;
They invite me to a ſecond vow, which may
Atone thoſe crimes which have diſſolv'd the firſt:
No, I no longer doubt their providence,
My heart implicitly obeys their laws.
Arzaces I obey—I ſee that you
Were born to reign o'er me and o'er the world.

Ota. Arzaces, Madam?

Sem. ——In the Scythian plains
When vanquiſh'd Aſia yielded to my power,
This hero, by his father's ſide he fought,
Environ'd round with captives, and with ſlain,
Offer'd me bluſhing, with victorious hands,
The bloody ſpoils of vanquiſh'd enemies:
At ſeeing him emotion fill'd my heart,
To him it ſeem'd by inſtinct to incline;
My faculties were by ſome charm o'erpower'd,
I all the world deſpis'd, compar'd to him.

The jealous *Aſſur* kept his eyes upon me;
He ſhrunk to hear *Arzaces'* name pronounc'd:
But ſtill my mind was fill'd with his idea,
Before the hand divine had trac'd it there,
Before that voice which ſtruck my ſoul with awe,
Directed me to hope in him alone.

Ota. Can then that mighty ſpirit ſtoop ſo low,
That ſpirit which with ſcorn rejected kings
As lovers, but has rank'd them with her ſlaves,
You priz'd but meanly that tranſcendent grace,
Which glory has reflected on the throne:
And whilſt the world your potent eyes ador'd,
Their triumph, you with unconcern beheld,
And does your heart now feel the charm of love?
Can ſentiments ſo tender then ſucceed,
To all the torments you have felt to-day?

Sem. No, 'tis not love that o'er my heart prevails,
I am not weakly, by my eyes ſubdu'd.
Think not I can ſo far forget my rank,
Or be ſeduc'd ſo far by outward charms,
As on them to beſtow the price of worth.
Higher by far I deem my ſentiments.
Should the ſoft paſſion touch afflicted breaſts?
And ſhould not wretches be exempt from love?
A mother's tenderneſs once fill'd my breaſt;
Not long theſe hapleſs arms contain'd the child;
Of my firſt hope I quickly was bereft.
To anguiſh thus become a conſtant prey,
Poſſeſs'd of nothing that my ſoul could love:
I all the emptineſs of grandeur felt,
The farce of ſtate then ſhunning, and myſelf,
I ſought repoſe in monuments of art,
Amuſements of a ſoul that flies from thought.

Repoſe

Repoſe a ſtranger long at length returns,
A ſecret joy pervades my wond'ring mind;
My ſpouſe, my ſon, the world, my glory, all
At once by my *Arzaces* are ſupply'd.
What incenſe do I owe thy ſacred ſhrine
Oh power, who mak'ſt me re-aſſume the yoke?
That yoke, which formerly has prov'd my bane,
And mak'ſt me feel a flame by you inſpir'd.

Ota. But do you not foreſee what furious rage
Will tear the breaſt of *Aſſur* at the news?
His hopes are by the public voice confirm'd,
The people think him only, worthy of you;
From his reſentment, dire effects may ſpring.

Sem. I have explain'd myſelf, I fear him not:
Full fifteen years I've known to check his pride,
The rank of ſubject he has never paſs'd;
To his ambition, object of diſtruſt,
Bounds I preſcrib'd, and held him in reſpect:
I then reign'd ſingle. If my feeble hand
Could bridle thus his fierce aſpiring ſoul,
How weak muſt his intrigues, how weak his rage
Prove, when I'm united with *Arzaces?*
Sure *Ninus* ſatisfied with my remorſe,
To preſs this marriage riſes from the grave.
His ſacred ſhade already injur'd much,
Againſt me might with reaſon be incens'd;
Should he at once behold his bed defil'd,
And throne uſurp'd by his fell murderer.
'Tis this that calls him from the hallow'd vault:
The oracle, and *Ninus'* ghoſt agree;
No longer do I dread the prieſt auſtere,
I've ſent for him to hear my royal will;
I now expect him.

Ota.

Ota. —So rever'd a name,
His ſacred character will back your choice.

Sem. His voice will to my boſom peace reſtore.

Ota. He comes.

SCENE II.

SEMIRAMIS, ORŒS.

Sem. Oh! thou the auguſt ſucceſſor
Of the fam'd founder of the magian ſect,
To name a king I now prepare; 'tis yours
With holy hands to crown his ſacred head.
Are all things ready for the ſolemn rite?

Oro. The princes and the magi all attend;
My duty 'tis t' obey the royal will:
We judge not monarchs, that belongs alone
To the juſt gods—

Sem. By this ambiguous phraſe,
You ſeem my preſent purpoſe to condemn.

Oro. Moſt earneſtly I pray the righteous gods
To proſper your deſign, to me unknown.

Sem. You who interpret heaven's high will, declare
Theſe ſigns; preſage they any dire event?
My eyes have ſeen a ghoſt, perhaps a god;
Sudden into the womb of earth he plung'd.
What power divine has broke the eternal bound
Which ſeparated earth from hell below?
Wherefore do mortals fate's decree infringe
From death's pale manſions, wherefore do they riſe?

Oro. Sometimes the will divine ſuſpends that law
Itſelf eſtabliſh'd before time began:
The courſe of nature ſometimes it inverts,
Kings to inſtruct, and terrify the earth.

Sem. A ſacrifice Ammon's oracle requires.

Oro. It ſhall have one———

Sem.

Sem. ——Eternal juſtice hear;
You who read all the ſecrets of my heart,
Make it no more a prey to direful pangs;
Blot from your mem'ry the dire idea
Of my firſt marriage, and of all its horrors.

To Oroes, *who was preparing to retire.*

Return——

Oro. ——I fear'd my preſence might diſturb.

Sem. This morn did not *Arzaces* offer gifts
Upon the altars of th' immortal gods?

Oro. He did; his offerings to the gods are dear.

Sem. Theſe chearing words convey a ray of hope.
May I depend on happineſs with him?

Oro. *Arzaces* is the empire's nobleſt prop;
The gods who gave his greatneſs are his guides.

Sem. The happy preſage I accept with joy;
Returning hope with tranſport fills my heart.
Let clouds of ſmoak from fragrant cenſers roll;
Go forth, and with your magi's bands auguſt,
The favour of the gracious heavens implore
On this important marriage, this juſt choice:
And may this ſtate's eternal deſtiny
At once grow bright, and with new ſplendor ſhine!

SCENE III.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

Sem. Thus my deſign the will of heaven awards,
And with aſſent divine confirms my choice.
How will *Arzaces* be ſurpriz'd to ſee
A kingly ſceptre offer'd to his hand?
How will the haughty *Aſſur*'s pride be humbled!
When by a word I make his rival lord:
How grateful muſt he be for ſuch a gift!

In marrying him I bring the world as dow'r.
My glory is compleat, my bliſs extreme.

SCENE IV.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES, MITRANES, *and an Officer of the palace.*

Ota. Arzaces, Madam, urgently requeſts
Admittance to your preſence—inward grief
Preys on his heart——refuſe him not that grace.

Sem. And can *Arzaces* grieve whilſt I am near?
'Twas he alone that eas'd me of my ſorrows:
Without delay admit him—my whole heart
Is his, and to it he may claim a right.
You manes whom I dread, you guardian gods,
Gods of Aſſyria, *Ninus*, and my ſon,
Unite in the protection of *Arzaces*.
But wherefore do I ſhudder at his view?

SCENE V.

SEMIRAMIS, ARZACES.

Arz. My life is to thy uſe devoted, queen,
I in your cauſe, would every drop of blood
With joy and tranſport ſhed, nor aſk reward.
My ſire enjoy'd his ſhare of warlike fame,
Like a brave ſoldier, at your army's head
He dy'd, and left to his unhappy ſon
The beſt inheritance, a good example.
I ſhould not have preſum'd thus to recall
His deeds to your remembrance—were it not
That from the glory of the ſire alone,
The ſon, who bends before your ſacred knees,
Can hope t' obtain the favour he implores.
I own my raſhneſs, and I own the crime
Of forming wiſhes which may ſeem too bold;
I even fear t' offend you whilſt I ſerve.

Sem.

Sem. What you offend me?—oh, the fear is vain.

Arz. Your ſtate you give, you give your royal hand.
My ſcruples and my fears I muſt ſuppreſs,
Although your choice imports ſo much to all.
With proſtrate front I muſt in ſilence wait,
With crowds of kings, a king to reign o'er all.
But *Aſſur* haughtily this honour claims;
With joy elate, and of ſucceſs ſecure:
The people points him out as of your race!
But I will own my ſoul diſdains to ſtoop;
I can't adore the man I lately brav'd,
Nor can I bear to crouch beneath his pride.
Oh queen! permit me therefore to retire
To climes remote, tho' loth to quit your preſence.

Sem. What words are theſe? why would you fly from [hence!
Do you fear *Aſſur*?

Arz. No, this daring heart
Your anger fears, and knows no fear beſide.
Perhaps you know how high my love aſpires;
Perhaps may thwart my too aſpiring vows.
I tremble——

Sem. —Hope rather, for you ſoon will be convinc'd
That *Aſſur* was not born to be your king.

Arz. Then I will own, 'twould ſhock me to behold
Aſſur the partner of your bed and throne:
But ſhould he miſs his aim, is *Azema*
Doom'd to fall victim to the tyrant's love?
Excuſe my warmth, it ſprings from zeal alone;
Do you not fear his dark, ambitious aims?
To *Ninias*, *Azema* was once betroth'd,
From the ſame blood *Aſſur* derives his birth:
I'm but a ſubject—yet againſt his claim—

Sem. Subjects like you can beſt ſupport a throne.

Your

Your ſentiments I know; your noble ſoul
Inſpir'd by love, no other motive knows:
You know my intereſts; I to your hands
Commit them, and expect from you ſupport.
Aſſur and *Azema* ſhall ne'er unite;
I well foreſee the danger of their match;
His dark deſigns ſhall all abortive prove.

Arz. Since then you know my love; ſince you have read
The ſecret wiſh and purpoſe of my heart——

Enter AZEMA *with precipitation.*

Aze. Thus proſtrate at your feet——

Sem. ——Riſe, princeſs riſe,
Whate'er my choice, you ever here ſhall find
A treatment worthy of your anceſtors:
I hop'd you would have been my *Ninias'* bride,
And ſtill I ſee you with a mother's eye.
Come take your places; now the lords and magi
Aſſemble to bear witneſs to my choice.

To Arzaces.

Stand near the the throne, oh, thou its beſt ſupport!

SCENE VI.

Scene changes from the apartment of Semiramis, *to a large ſalon magnificently adorned. Many officers all bearing the marks of their ſeveral dignities, ſtand upon ſteps raiſed above each other. A throne is placed in the midſt of the ſalon: the Satraps ſtand by it. The High-Prieſt enters with the Magi; he ſtands between* Aſſur *and* Arzaces. *The Queen is ſeen in the middle, with* Azema *and her women. Guards ſtand at the bottom of the ſalon.*

Oro. Princes and magi, lords and warriors,
By order of the queen aſſembled here,
To you our god's decrees ſhall be reaveal'd:
Our ſtate's, their care, and now the day is come

Which

Which they have deſtin'd for ſome great event.
Whoever is elected by the queen
To ſhare her throne and bed, and rule the ſtate;
'Tis ours t'obey, and to revere her choice.
The vows and homage which to kings we owe,
I in the name of all the magi pay;
I pray for them, and for the public good.
May theſe auſpicious, theſe triumphant days
Never aſſume the duſky hue of grief;
Never, oh, never may theſe ſongs of joy
Be chang'd into the plaintive ſound of woe.

Aze. Pontiff and lords, a king is to be nam'd;
I only am affected by the choice:
But born a ſubject, I am a ſubject ſtill;
I the queen's will implicitly obey.
No ominious conjecture on th' event
I'll caſt, but by example teach ſubmiſſion.

Aſſ. Whatever the high will of heaven decides,
Be now the public good our chiefeſt care:
Let's ſwear both by the throne, and by the queen,
To pay a blind ſubmiſſion to her choice,
And without murmuring obey her will.

Arz. I ſwear it, and this arm, this heart that pays
Reſpect to her, next to the gods themſelves;
This blood which oft I've ſhed even in her ſight,
To my new maſter here I do devote,
With the ſame zeal which warm'd me in her cauſe.

H. Pr. I wait the will of heaven, and of the queen.

Sem. My ſubjects, lend me an attentive ear.

[*She ſeats herſelf upon the throne.*

Azema, Aſſur, *the High-Prieſt and* Arzaces *having taken their places, ſhe continues.*

If with my glory ſtruck, th' admiring world

Full

Full fifteen years the ſceptre has rever'd,
Even in a female hand, by ancient laws
Deſtin'd to bear the diſtaff and obey:
If I have borne this empire's mighty weight
With a ſucceſs that has ſurpriz'd mankind;
I'll ſhare it now the better to ſupport,
To ſpread its glory to remoteſt times;
T' obey the gods whoſe will irrevocable,
Humbles this fierce, this once undaunted heart.
One ſon they took from me; may they beſtow
Sons worthy to ſucceed to ſuch a power:
Sons that may tread the paths I had mark'd out,
And equal all the grandeur of my reign!
I might have choſen a ſcepter'd king, but they
Whoſe ſtates ſurround my own, are all my foes,
Or elſe ſubdu'd already by my arms;
My crown is not for ſuch—I higher prize
My ſubjects of high rank, than kings whom I,
Or even they themſelves have oft ſubdu'd.
If Belus, born a ſubject, wore the crown,
He ow'd it to the people, to himſelf;
I by a right like his, my ſceptre hold.
The wide extended regions I command,
Surpaſs by far the realms poſſeſs'd by him;
I have compleated what he but began.
States by the means that form them are ſuſtain'd.
A hero of high worth this empire claims,
Deſerving of ſuch ſubjects: may I add,
Deſerving of the hand that gives the crown.
The gods I have conſulted, ſearch'd the laws,
Weigh'd the ſtate's int'reſt, and the world's at once;
The fate of mankind on my choice depends;
Revere the hero who becomes your king:

In him behold reviv'd my princely race.
Arzaces is the hero I elect.

[*She deſcends from the throne, and all preſent riſe up.*

Aze. Arzaces! oh, perfidious man!——

Aſſ. ——Oh, rage!

Arzaces *to* Azema.

Ah, think not——

Oro. ——Gracious gods aſſiſt us now.

Semiramis *advances to the front of the ſtage, and addreſſes the Magi.*

Oh you who ſanctify the pureſt flames
Approach—our ſolemn promiſes confirm,
Ninus and *Ninus'* ſon are now reſtor'd.

[*Claps of thunder are heard, and the tomb appears to ſhake.*]

Oro. In this dread hour protect us gracious gods.

Sem. Why does heaven roll its thunder o'er our heads?
Is good or ill foreboded by the ſound?
Pardon me gods in favour of *Arzaces!*
Lo! the tomb opens—ſee he comes—I die!——

[*The ghoſt of* Ninus *riſes from the monument.*

Aſſ. The ghoſt of *Ninus!* can it be, ye gods!

Arz. Oh ſpeak thou awful ſhade, what muſt we do?

Aſſ. Speak.

Sem. Oh com'ſt thou to deſtroy, or to forgive?
Thy bed and ſceptre I have juſt beſtow'd;
Judge if this hero's worthy of your place.
Your anſwer ſhall determine me——

The ghoſt addreſſes himſelf to Arzaces.

——*Arzaces,*
Thou ſhalt aſcend the throne, but there are crimes
Which firſt thy ſword muſt expiate by blood.
Thy arm to *Ninus'* duſt ſhall ſacrifice

Even

Even in his tomb—ſerve both the ſon and ſire;
Thy ſire remember—liſten to the prieſt.

Arz. Oh gracious form—oh demi-god rever'd,
Whoſe powerful influence animates theſe climes,
Thy ſight with courage fills me, not with dread.
Thy tomb I'll enter, ſhould I riſk my life.
Conclude, whom woul'dſt thou that I ſacrifice?

[*The ghoſt goes towards the door of the monument.*

He flies us, he departs——

Sem. —Oh injur'd ſhade!
Permit me to embrace thy ſacred knees,
And let my ſorrow——

[*The ghoſts ſpeaks at the door of the monument.*

——Hold, reſpect my duſt;
At a fit ſeaſon we again ſhall meet.

[*The ghoſtenters and the monument ſhuts.*

Aſſ. What horrid prodigy!——

Sem. ———My people follow,
Enter the temple, lay aſide your fears;
This injur'd ghoſt at length may be appeas'd.
It has declar'd in favour of *Arzaces*,
And therefore will not prove to me ſevere.
Now to the gods, whom monarchs muſt obey,
Let us the tribute of our homage pay.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

The Scene repreſents the Porch of the Temple.

ARZACES, AZEMA.

ARZACES.

AH, do not aggravate my weight of woe,
This oracle with horror fills my ſoul.
Shock'd nature teems with ſigns and portents dire:
Muſt cruel heaven deprive me of your heart?

Aze. Ceaſe perjur'd man, nor add to what I feel
By talking of thy love; 'twas falſhood all.
I combat not the queen who gives her crown,
The ſpeaking dead, nor thy perfidious heart:
By various prodigies my ſoul appall'd,
Finds none that equal thy inconſtancy.
Compleat thy work, propitiate *Ninus'* ghoſt,
By me begin thy horrid ſacrifice,
Strike here ungrateful man——

Arz. ——My wounded heart
Was not againſt this cruel ſtroke prepar'd.
Inhuman maid, judge from my grief profound
Whether this heart prefers you to a throne;
If I have brav'd the dangers of the field,
And fame acquir'd, it was for you alone:
In all my labours, all my hardy deeds,
To merit you was my ambition's height.
Semiramis is dear to me, I own,
Your praiſes of her have conſpir'd with mine:

We thought her both a guardian power, whoſe care
Kindly protected our myſterious love.
Perhaps the gods who dwell in bowers of bliſs,
Require ſuch holy homage, ſure pure love.
When the queen choſe me, judge of my ſurprize,
Think of the precipice that gapes before us:
Hear my fate to the end———

Aze. ——I know it all.

Arz. I was not born for empire nor for thee.
This ſon I am to ſerve is *Ninias'* ſelf,
The ſon of *Ninus*, and his only heir———

Aze. Proceed——

Arz. With whom, an infant,
You were united by the marriage-tye,
At once my monarch and my rival born——

Aze. Ninias——

Arz. ——He lives, and ſhortly will appear.

Aze. Ninias! juſt heaven! the queen believ'd him dead.

Arz. The queen deceiv'd, long wept a ſon who lives.

Aze. Ninias then lives——

Arz. ——'Tis kept a ſecret ſtill
Deep in the temple, from the queen conceal'd.

Aze. But *Ninus* crowns you, and his widow's yours.

Arz. But you eſpouſe his ſon; his ſon's my king,
And I muſt ſerve him. Fatal oracle!

Aze. Love ſpeaks, I'm ſatisfy'd, and aſk no more;
His orders from obſcurity are free:
That is the only oracle I'll hear.
Since *Ninias* then is living let him come:
Her promiſe let his mother here renew,
And let his father, from the grave return'd,
Th' engagements of our infancy confirm;
Let mighty *Ninias*, thy king and rival,

Feel

Feel all the love that ſhould inſpire thy breaſt;
Come, and thou ſhalt behold his love deſpis'd,
Himſelf, his throne, his love, I ſcorn them all.
But where is *Ninias*? ſay, what myſtery
Can from the mother keep her ſon conceal'd?
But let him come; he nor the queen herſelf,
No, nor the ghoſt ſent forth from gaping Hell,
Nor ſhall a general wreck of nature force
This conſtant heart to violate its faith.
Do you, *Arzaces*, well conſult yourſelf;
And ſtrive to copy after my example.
But what are then theſe crimes, which hell enrag'd,
Which *Ninus*' ghoſt command to be aton'd?
No, cruel *Arzaces*, if you break your vows,
No crime how black ſoe'er can equal yours.
Th' interpreter of fate I ſee ariſe,
Its laws to dictate from his dark retreat:
The hapleſs paſſion which you violate
Muſt not prevent you to conſult the gods.
Go, hear the menacing decrees of *Ninus*;
My fate on thee depends, thine on the gods. [*Exit* Aze.

Arz. I'm thine, and only thine; ſtay, cruel, ſtay:
Oh mixture ſtrange of horror and of bliſs!
Strange deſtinies which with each other jar!

SCENE II.

ARZACES, ORQES, *followed by the Magi.*

Orqes *to* Arzaces.

To yon deep ſolitude let us retire.
What ſharp afflictions pierce your ſoul, I know;
For new aſſault of trouble ſtand prepar'd.

To the Magi.

The diadem of ſacred majeſty

Bring me, you Magi——take that ſword and letter.

[*The Magi obeys the orders of the High-Prieſt.*

Arz. Save me, my father, from the pit that yawns
Under my feet——draw back that gloomy veil.

Oro. The veil will quickly fall, my ſon, the hour
Is come when *Ninus* in his dark retreat
Expects you ſhould his cries appeaſe——'tis yours
To make an off'ring to his injur'd ghoſt.

Arz. What order's this? what off'ring is requir'd?
Whilſt *Ninias* lives ſhould I revenge his ſire?
Let him approach, my arm ſhall aid my king.

Oro. The order giv'n implicitly obey.
Within an hour to *Ninus'* tomb repair,

[*He gives the diadem and the ſword to* Arzaces.

Arm'd with this ſacred ſword, thy temples bound
With the ſame diadem the monarch wore,
That diadem which you yourſelf have brought.

Arz. The diadem of *Ninus?*

Oro. So his ſhade
Commands you to attend him at his tomb,
Where you muſt make a bloody ſacrifice.
Strike boldly, give the vengeance he requires:
The victim will be there; I've ſaid enough.
The gods will to the tomb conduct its ſteps.

Arz. Let them command, my blood I will not ſpare.
But *Ninias*, ſir, you do not ſpeak of him;
You do not tell me how his ſire himſelf
Would give me both his wife and diadem.

Oro. Give you his wife! give you *Semiramis!*
Know then the hour I promis'd is arriv'd;
Know your own fate, that impious woman know——

Arz. Oh heavens——

Oro. ——her huſband ſhe depriv'd of life.

Arz.

Arz. What did the queen!——

Oro. The villain *Aſſur* gave
With his deteſted hand the pois'nous draught,

ARZACES, *after a ſhort pauſe.*

No bloody act in *Aſſur* can ſeem ſtrange:
But how can I believe a wife, a queen,
Darling of nations, and the monarch's boaſt,
Could e'er be guilty of ſo foul a deed!
Can ſo much merit dwell with ſuch a crime?

Oro. This doubt, *Arzaces*, ſhews a ſoul ſublime;
But now I nothing muſt extenuate:
Each moment of this day ſhall be reveal'd
A ſecret to make frighted nature ſtart:
E'en now ſhe at your heart-ſtrings tugs; her voice,
Her pow'rful cries you hear, and groan oppreſs'd.
Wonder not if indignant *Ninus* leaves
His tomb to viſit this polluted court:
He comes to break a knot by furies tied,
And bring unpuniſh'd villainy to light:
He comes from inceſt to preſerve his ſon.
E'en now he waits your coming, know your ſire;
The queen's your mother; *Ninias* is your name.

Arz. So many mortal wounds at once receiv'd
My pow'rs o'erwhelm, and round me hovers death!
And am I then *Semiramis*'s ſon?

Oro. Do you ſtill doubt? know *Ninus* at his death
Convinc'd that poiſon rankled in his veins,
That you were likewiſe menanc'd with its rage,
The venom preying on the ſprings of life,
Dying remov'd you from this impious court.——
Aſſur compleating his fell crimes on you,
Poiſon'd the ſon, the mother to eſpouſe.
The royal race extinct, he thought the throne

Muſt

Muſt to perfidious boldneſs be a prey;
And whilſt the palace wept the loſs ſuppos'd,
Phradates ſav'd you from the jaws of death.
Thoſe pow'rful ſimples which in Perſia's plains
The ſun with warmth benign brings forth, prepar'd
With care by ſage *Phradates'* healing art,
Chas'd from your veins the poiſon's virulence.
The place of his loſt ſon you long ſupply'd;
Arzaces was the name you always bore.
Phradates waited ſtill ſome happy change:
The God who judges kings wills otherwiſe.
The truth deſcends from heav'n in terrors clad,
And yawning ſepulchres with vengeance teem.

Arz. Have I not then been try'd enough, ye gods!
Was it for this you ſav'd me from the rage
Of death, to make me feel ſeverer pangs?
Semiramis—I then receiv'd my life
Amidſt flagitious greatneſs, ſplendid crimes.
My mother—Heavens, what dire diſcoveries!
If the curſt *Aſſur* were alone to blame,
Could it be prov'd——

OROES, *putting the letter into his hands.*

——Theſe ſacred characters
The myſteries of horror fully prove;
The record of her crime you here behold:
Do you ſtill doubt?——

Arz. ——I would to heaven I could!
Shew me the letter, that there may remain
No flatt'ring doubt——

Oro. ——Alas! it is too clear.

ARZACES *reads.*

The dying Ninius *to his faithful friend* Phradates.

I dye poiſon'd; take care of my ſon; preſerve Ninias *from his cruel enemies; my guilty wife——*

Oro. And does not that convince you? *Ninus'* hand,
Which wrote your fate, was then benumb'd by death.
Phradates in this letter tells the reſt;
His evidence the fatal news confirms.
Let that ſuffice; 'tis *Ninus* lifts your arm:
He from his tomb will guide you to his throne;
He calls for blood——

ARZACES, *after having read the letter.*

Oh day with wonders fill'd!
Thou hell that didſt addreſs me, thy dire words
Are more obſcure to my confounded mind,
Than the dark tomb to which I now am call'd,
The victim from the ſacrificer's hid:
The choice ſeems dreadful——

Oro. —— rather dread the crime.
Go in the horrors which o'ercaſt your ſoul,
Heav'n that has ſpoke to you will be your guide.
Think yourſelf now above the common lot,
Entruſted with the great decrees of heaven,
Mark'd by the gods, and ſet apart from men;
Though darkneſs hangs upon your fate, advance.
Weak inſtrument to gods from whom you ſpring;
You muſt not call in queſtion their beheſts,
Preſerv'd from death adore their pow'r divine,
Nor murmur, but with thankful heart obey.

SCENE III.

ARZACES, MITRANES.

Arz. Theſe dreadful words with ſcorpions fill my breaſt;
The queen my mother! can it be, ye gods!

MITRANES

MITRANES *entering.*

The city, ſir, amidſt the general wreck,
Calls for the king its terrors to diſpel:
Receive the homage which I gladly pay
To the queen's huſband, to my rightful king.
Semiramis with ardour ſeeks your view;
I bleſs the moment that unites you both.
You anſwer not. Deſpair ſits on your brow.
You ſpeak not, and your eyes with anguiſh roll;
A livid paleneſs ſpreads your cheek, your limbs
Shiver with terror: what may be the cauſe?

Arz. Let's fly to *Azema.*

Mit. ——What may this mean!
Can you, my lord, ſo cruelly inſult
The goodneſs of the queen, her flame, her choice,
Her heart which ſcorns ſo many kings for you?
Muſt then her hopes in you be all deceiv'd?

Arz. Gods! 'tis *Semiramis* that meets my eyes!
Abode infernal, tomb of *Ninus*, hide
Her crimes and me within your open'd gulphs.

SCENE IV.

SEMIRAMIS, ARZACES.

Sem. For you we wait, come maſter of the world,
Its fate depends on you as well as mine;
That badge of honour I with joy behold,
With which the pontiff has adorn'd your brow,
That ſacred diadem, undoubted proof,
That heav'n and deepeſt hell confirm my choice.
Fierce *Aſſur*'s faction ſtruck with holy awe,
Yields at the voice divine, and dreads my view.
Propitious *Ninus* now an off'ring aſks:
Grant his deſire, no more defer my bliſs.
All hearts are ours, our marriage all approve;

You

You have my love, and vain is *Aſſur*'s rage.

Arzaces, *in a violent agitation,*

Oh in the blood of that perfidious wretch!
In his vile blood let's waſh his parricide!
Let us revenge the death of *Ninus*——

Sem. Gods!

Arzaces, *with a diſtracted air.*

Did not you tell me that his guilty arm,

Recovering himſelf.

Had——that he audaciouſly his arms turns
Againſt his queen; deſerves he not my hate?

Sem. Receive my faith, and then revenge my cauſe.

Arz. My father!

Sem. —Gods, what mean thoſe brows ſevere!
Is this that tenderneſs, that ſoft return
Which I expected when I gave my hand?
'Tis true, the frightful objects we have ſeen,
The dead broke looſe from the profound abyſs,
May well leave terror in your mind—but I
Dread them no more ſince I *Arzaces* ſee.
Ah do not draw a low'ring cloud of grief
O'er the firſt moments of ſo bright a day:
Be ſuch as I beheld you at my feet,
When *Aſſur* as a maſter you diſclaim'd;
No more fear *Ninus*, or his angry ghoſt,
Arzaces my defence, my huſband, ſpeak,
Dear prince——

Arz. ——It is too much to bear; I ſhrink
With the bare thought of ſuch enormous crimes.
Hold——

Sem. ——What anguiſh tears his ſwoln heart? yet he
Alone could to my boſom peace reſtore!

Arz. Semiramis.

Sem. Say you!

Arz. Fly me for ever or deprive of life.

Sem. What phrenzy's this! ſay, wherefore ſhould I fly?
Explain this perturbation which has ſeiz'd
Your ſoul, and equal horror rais'd in mine.
Upon your face deſpair with ghaſtly hue
Gleams terrible, and harrows up my ſoul;
Your blood-ſhot eyes inſpire me with more dread
Than the rais'd dead and heav'n in league againſt me.
I offer you my crown with trembling hand,
And with a faltering tongue declare my love.
Some unknown inſtinct's ſtrong attraction now
Urges me tow'rds you, now repels again,
And ſtill a buſy ſomething at my heart
Mingles ſtrange horror with my tender love.

Arz. Hate me.——

Sem. ——No, ſure you cannot wiſh my hate.
I'll never leave thee, never ceaſe to love.
What means that letter which your flowing eyes
With horror read and moiſten with your tears?
The cauſe of your refuſal does it ſhew?

Arz. It does.

Sem. Let me then ſee it.

Arz. Alas! I cannot; dare you read it?

Sem. ——Yes.

Arz. In my poſſeſſion leave the horrid ſcroll.

Sem. From whom did you receive it?——

Arz. ——From the gods.

Sem. How was it wrote then?——

Arz. ——By my father's hand.

Sem. Ha! what is this you tell me?——

Arz. ——tremble now.

Sem. Give it, that I may know what fate decrees.

Arz.

Arz. Beware--each word would pierce you to the heart.
Sem. Let it—or clear the doubt I labour with,
Or I muſt think you criminal.—Diſpatch.
Arz. Oh all directing gods! you force me to it!
Semiramis, *taking the letter.*
Obey, *Arzaces*, I once more command.
Arz. May this then prove the only puniſhment
By the juſt gods ordain'd for ſuch a crime.
You'll know too much; but 'tis your own deſire.
Semiramis *to* Otanes.
What have I read! ſupport me, or I die.
Arz. Alas all now is known.——
Sem. ——Delay no more;
Fulfil thy deſtiny, and with thy ſword
Relentleſs pierce this wretched guilty breaſt;
Pour out my blood to quench my odious flame.
Nature recoils with horror at my love:
Revenge my crimes, revenge your father's death,
Strike here, my ſon, your mother's crimes attone.
ARZACES, *otherwiſe* NINIAS.
Oh rather may this ſword my boſom gore,
And ſpill the blood which I derive from you:
Oh rather take it, and transfix a heart
That bears the ſacred character of ſon.
Semiramis *throwing herſelf upon her knees.*
I knew not pity; be inhuman too:
Shew thyſelf *Ninus'* ſon, his death revenge:
Strike.—Doſt thou mingle then thy tears with mine?
O day of horror full, and of delight!——
Before you give the death my crimes deſerve,
Ah let thy guilty mother's ſtreaming tears
Bathe that dear hand, the miniſter of fate.
Nin. I am your ſon, it is not meet that you,

However guilty, ſhould embrace my knees.
Ninias ſubmiſſive bows, and to you ſwears
The moſt profound reſpect and tender love.
He'll prove your deareſt and moſt humble ſubject;
Heav'n is appeas'd ſince it reſtores his ſon;
Yield *Aſſur* up to the vindictaive gods.

Sem. Deign to accept my ſceptre and my crown;
Too long I have defil'd them——

Nin. ——All's forgot;
Aſia ſhall ſtill admire you on the throne.

Sem. My crime's too great.——

Nin. ——Repentance will at one.

Sem. *Ninus* commands you to aſſume my place;
His angry manes fear——

Nin. ——They will relent:
A mother's anguiſh muſt their pity move,
Nor ſhall my filial tears in vain be ſhed.
Be careful, good *Otanes*, of the queen;
Mean time deep bury'd in thy faithful breaſt
Be this dire myſtery with care ſuppreſt.

ACT V. SCENE I.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

OTANES.

THINK that ſome god propitious interpos'd
To ſave you, and prevent thoſe nuptials dire;
Aſtoniſh'd nature at your danger ſhrunk,
For fear of inceſt ſhe reſtor'd your ſon.
Th' expreſs commands of Ammon's oracle,
Infernal voices, royal *Ninus'* Ghoſt
Told you that all your miſery ſhould end
When Hymen had receiv'd your ſecond vows.
They did not ſay the marriage ſhould take place;
Your fate's decided ſince it was prepar'd.
Ninias reveres you; ſoon the gracious gods
A ſecret offering ſhall propitiate:
This dreaded day inſures your future bliſs.

Sem. Is bliſs then made for ſuch a wretch as I?
Tender compaſſion ſeiz'd my ſon; I hope
That now the anguiſh of a parent's heart
Affects him more than *Ninus* and my crimes;
But rigour ſoon to pity may ſucceed,
A father's murder may excite his rage.

Ota. Why theſe ſad thoughts? how can you fear a ſon?

Sem. Fear waits on crimes, and is their puniſhment.
Is this event to cruel *Aſſur* known?
Has he of late made any new attempt?

Ota. This dreadful ſecret is unknown to all,
The oracle of *Ninus* is rever'd:

Aſtoniſhment has ſeiz'd upon the crowd,
Nor can they gueſs the meaning of his words;
How ſerve his ſon? his aſhes why revenge?
They wait in ſilent wonder for the time
Deſtin'd to end ſo many dire alarms,
When from the open'd ſhrine the god ſhall ſpeak.
The frighted *Azema* with haggard eyes
Stalks round the tomb, and lifts her hands to heaven.
Your ſon is in the temple, and with dread
Prepares to ſlay the victim yet unknown:
Aſſur with ſullen fury is poſſeſs'd,
And ſtrives to rally his afflicted powers;
I know not what new project he has form'd.

Sem. Too long he has eluded my revenge;
Seize *Aſſur* quickly, load his limbs with chains;
To my ſon's hands the murderer conſign.
His ſword eternal juſtice will appeaſe
By ſhedding the aſſaſſin's guilty blood.
Then to his love be *Azema* reſtor'd,
And may their virtues all my crimes efface.
Ninus, you ſee my heart; reſt ſatisfy'd.
A mother's tenderneſs I ſtill poſſeſs.
Ah who is that that ſo abruptly comes?
Heav'ns! how each object makes me ſtart with fear!

SCENE II.

SEMIRAMIS, AZEMA, OTANES.

Aze. Forgive me, Madam, I uncall'd intrude,
But anxious cares perplex my throbbing heart,
Permit me to embrace your royal knees.

Sem. Speak, princeſs; what do you deſire of me?

Aze. To ſnatch a hero from impending fate——
Prevent a crime, to ſave *Arzaces'* life.

Sem. What crime? O heavens!——

Aze.

Aze. ——He is to ſhare your bed;
He has betray'd me, but he lives for you.
Sem. Arzaces ſhare my bed——
Aze. ——The bands of Hymen.
Sem. Such union would be odious, impious, vile;
Arzaces — what of him?—I ſhudder — ſpeak:
Explain the danger——
Aze. —Know then, gracious queen,
That in the moment that my voice implores—
Sem. Proceed——
Aze. ——That demi-god, whom ſtill I fear,
In ſecret makes an off'ring to the gods,
Deep in that labyrinth's obſcure receſs,
Whoſe winding maze is ſacred to the king;
What crime he's to atone I cannot tell.
Sem. What crime? O heavens!——
Aze. ——*Aſſur*, that impious wretch,
Prepares to violate the tomb by force.
Sem. How! *Aſſur!*——
Aze. ——In the horrors of the night
A ſubterraneous paſſage he has made,
Which ſerves the monſter's bloody purpoſes.
He comes to brave the dead, to brave the gods:
With ſacrilegious hand inur'd to crimes,
Arzaces to deprive of life he comes.
Sem. Juſt gods, what do I hear? how know you this?
Aze. You may believe me, love my voice inſpires;
Iv'e ſeen the villain *Aſſur*'s hate inflam'd;
I've ſeen to new rage his faction fire:
I've penetrated all his black deſigns,
And outwardly to his have join'd my cauſe;
I've ſet on ſpies to watch his every motion:
The homicide he undertakes himſelf;

He

He goes with ſacrilegious purpoſe fraught,
Convinc'd that none will in that holy place
Dare to appear, ſince the high-prieſt himſelf
Is thence excluded by the law divine;
Thither he flies with haſte. A rumour's ſpread,
That death *Arzaces* as his victim waits;
That *Ninus*' wrongs his blood muſt expiate.
The nobles and the people are aſſembled,
Murmurs confus'd on every ſide are heard.
Ninus I fear and angry heaven at once;
But above all I fear curſt *Aſſur*'s rage.

Sem. My deareſt *Azema*, heaven takes your part;
I ſee what now remains for me to do.
Upon a mother's love you may depend;
Our fates, my daughter, are connected now:
Defend your huſband while I ſave my ſon.

Aze. What do I hear, ye gods!——

Sem. ——Heaven made him known,
An inceſt to prevent, and now inſpires
His mother, anxious to preſerve her ſon.
But now the time is precious. Leave me here:
Give orders that the miniſters of heaven
And chief men of the ſtate attend their queen.
Azema *enters the porch of the temple*; Semiramis *approaches the monument on the other ſide.*
Shade of my ſpouſe, I'll now atone thy blood.
This is the fated inſtant that thy voice
Promis'd I to the tomb ſhould find acceſs:
I will obey, and arm theſe hands, which oft
Have guided armies, to defend my ſon.
Guards of the throne, your orders now receive
From brave *Arzaces*, and from him alone.
You've now no queen, *Arzaces* is your king;

On

On him the ſov'reign grandeur I confer;
At once defend your monarch, and obey.
[*The guards draw up at the bottom of the ſtage.*
Favour my project you all-powerful gods.
[*She enters the monument.*

SCENE III.

Azema *returning from the gates of the temple to the front of the ſtage.*

What ſecret purpoſe doth the queen revolve?
Can all her care th' impending crime prevent?
Oh prodigy! Oh fate in darkneſs hid!
Important, dreadful moment! O *Arzaces!*
Ye pow'rs ador'd, who o'er the world preſide,
Why take you from me whom you late reſtor'd!

SCENE IV.

AZEMA, ARZACES, *otherwiſe* NINIAS.

Aze. Stay, prince, lov'd *Ninias*, ſtay your ſteps awhile:
Are you my ſovereign then, and *Ninus'* ſon!
Nin. Alas my birth has cover'd me with ſhame;
Sprung from the gods, I'm ſhock'd at my deſcent.
The horrors that ſurround me diſſipate;
This heart a prey to anguiſh fortify;
Strengthen this lifted arm which now prepares
To wreak revenge on thoſe who ſlew my ſire.
Aze. Beware how you fulfil the bloody taſk.
Nin. A ſacrifice is due, I muſt obey.
Aze. *Ninus* deſires not that his ſon ſhould bleed.
Nin. What mean you?——
Aze. ——Go not to that dire abode;
A traitor lies in wait to ſhed your blood.
Nin. Who ſhall prevent my going? What ſhall fright me?

Aze. You are the victim doom'd to periſh there;
The villain *Aſſur* has with ſteps prophane
Trampling the ſacred tomb, the gods defy'd,
And now he waits you.——

Nin. ——Gods! the truth is known:
My heart's at eaſe at length the victim's found.
My father poiſon'd by this villain, claims
The blood of the deteſted parricide.
By heaven guided, and by *Oroes* taught,
Againſt the traitor arm'd by *Ninus'* ſelf,
I need but ſtrike the victim which the gods
Bring to my ſword, devoted now to bleed.
My arm in this fell hour I plainly ſee
Is the blind inſtrument of pow'r divine.
The gods have all conducted, and my ſoul
Implicitly obeys the voice of fate.
The hand of heav'n is over us I ſee:
Hell opens, ghoſts from the abyſs ariſe,
And portents ſtrange are every day beheld:
Fearleſs the voice divine I will obey.

Aze. The ways of heaven ſtrike terror to my ſoul:
Ninus they lov'd, and yet they would not ſave.

Nin. Murmur no more; the gods revenge his death.

Aze. Sometimes the innocent their vengeance feel;
The blood oft guiltleſs victims of they ſhed.

Nin. Since they unite us they eſpouſe our cauſe:
The words my father utter'd they inſpir'd;
They have reſtor'd my mother and my throne;
They have reſtor'd my *Azema*, and ſoon
Stain'd with the guilty *Aſſur's* blood I'll come,
And to the altar lead my beauteous bride.
'Tis mine t'obey, the gods will do the reſt.

SCENE

SCENE V.

AZEMA, *ſola.*

In the dire vault ye gods direct his ſteps!
Where will this end? whoſe blood is to be ſhed?
I ſhudder, awful heav'n, at your decree.
The ſanguinary *Aſſur* is my dread:
On the ſire's aſhes he may ſlay the ſon.
Abyſs profound, whence *Ninus'* ghoſt aroſe,
May this fell monſter, by your depth abſorb'd,
Bear to hell's gloom his unrelenting rage.
Pour down your vengeance, heaven, your thunders lance.
Ah wherefore, *Ninus*, didſt thou not permit
His trembling miſtreſs to attend your ſon?
Ninus defends him in the dark abode;
I hear his voice amidſt thoſe horrid ſhrieks.
Should the mauſoleum, by my ſteps prophan'd,
Gape wide to ſwallow me in inſtant death;
I will deſcend——hark, thunders burſt around,
The lightning's blaze glares hideous through the gloom,
And the earth trembles whereſoe'er I tread.
I float 'twixt hope and fear. He comes——

SCENE VI.

NINIAS *enters with a bloody ſword in his hand.*

Nin. ——Good heaven!
Where do you guide my ſteps?——
Aze. ——Alas, my lord,
You drop with blood, your cheek a deadly pale
Beſpreads, and horror chills your very frame.
Nin. You ſee me cover'd with the traitor's blood.
Thro' the dark tomb conducted by my ſire,
Some time I wander'd in the gloomy maze,
Trembling with awe, with horror, and ſurpriſe;
He march'd before me: I obſerv'd the place

By the indignant ſpirit pointed out.
Near to a column from the light remote,
Which gleam'd obſcurely through the diſmal gloom,
A weapon glitter'd in the villain's hand:
Trembling he ſtood.—On guilt fear ever waits.—
I pierc'd him twice with my revengful ſword,
And with an arm by fierce reſentment ſtrung,
I dragg'd his ſquallid body o'er the duſt
To where the glimm'ring light malignant ſhone;
But I will own his thick and frequent ſobs,
His feeble plaintive cries, his deep-fetch'd groans,
The gods whom he invok'd, and the remorſe
That ſeem'd to ſeize him in the pangs of death;
The holy place; compaſſion too, whoſe voice
Is heard ſoft-pleading when revenge is o'er;
Some thought perplex'd which ſhakes my very ſoul,
Made me retire, and leave the bloody corſe.
Whence can this inward perturbation ſpring?
What means this horror which invades my breaſt?
My heart and hands are innocent, ye gods;
The blood with which I reek yourſelves proſcrib'd;
Can they who ſerve you with remorſe be torn!

Aze. Youv'e paid your debt to nature and the dead.
Let's leave this dire abode, and ſeek the queen;
This agitatition in her preſence calm,
Since *Aſſur* is no more.——

SCENE VII.

NINIAS, AZEMA, ASSUR.

Aſſur *appears at a diſtance with* Otanes *and the queen's guards.*

Aze. ——Good heavens, 'tis he!
Nin. Aſſur!
Aze. ——Approach, ye miniſters of heaven;

Ye

Ye ſervants of the crown, defend your king.

SCENE VIII.

The High-preiſt, OROES, *the Magi, and people*, NINIAS, AZEMA, ASSUR *diſarmed*, MITRANES.

Mit. Our monarch does not want aſſiſtance now;
I caus'd the bloody traitor to be ſeiz'd
As he prepar'd to force this holy place.
I now into your hands deliver him.

Nin. What have I done? what victim have I ſlain?

Oro. Heaven is content, our vengeance is compleat.
[*Shewing* Aſſur.
Oh ſons of Babylon, you there behold
The parricide by whom your king was poiſon'd.
[*Shewing* Ninias.
There you behold the monarch's rightful heir.
Before you all I own him ſovereign lord;
Ninias reſtor'd with loyal hearts receive.

Aſſ. Art thou then *Ninias?*——

Oro. ——A vindictive god,
Whoſe vengeance hangs o'er thy devoted head,
Preſerv'd him from thy machinations dire.

Aſſ. Say, did'ſt thou from the queen receive thy birth?

Nin. Yes, and her power to puniſh thy foul deeds.
Of this inhuman monſter purge the earth:
He was not worthy by my hand to fall.
In ignominious tortures let him die;
The blood of ſuch a wretch would ſtain my ſword.

Semiramis *appears in a dying condition at the foot of the tomb; one of the Magi ſupports her.*

Aſſ. To ſee the king's my greateſt puniſhment;
[*Obſerving* Semiramis.
I leave you ſtill more wretched than myſelf:
Behold that tomb; thy bloody work behold.

Nin.

Nin. Ye gods, what blood has my blind fury ſhed!
Aze. Dear huſband, fly from hence——
Mit. ——What have you done?
Oroes, *placing himſelf between the tomb and* Ninias,
Go purify your hands beſmear'd with gore;
Give me that fatal ſword, blind inſtrument
Of wrath divine, which has o'ertaken guilt.
Ninias, *running to* Semiramis,
Ah rather let me plunge it in my breaſt.
Oroes, *whilſt attendants diſarm* Ninias,
From his own frantic rage preſerve your king.
Semiramis, *being brought forward, and plac'd in an elbow-chair, ſpeaks as follows.*
My ſon revenge your mother; by the ſword
Of a blood-thirſty parricide I die.
Nin. Oh heavy hour! Oh deed as black as hell!
This parricide, this monſter is your ſon!
I've pierc'd the breaſt which yielded nouriſhment
To my weak infancy——but ſoon the grave
Shall join us both——you ſoon ſhall be reveng'd.
Sem. To ſave your life the ſepulchre I enter'd,
Your hapleſs mother haſted to your aid——
The death to my offences juſtly due
Your hand inflicted, and they are aton'd.
Nin. My ſoul recoils with horror at the thought;
I here atteſt the gods, the gods whoſe power
My arm miſguided——
Sem. Son, let that ſuffice:
I pardon all that's paſt; let that dear hand,
As a laſt favour, cloſe my dying eyes.
Ninias *throws himſelf upon his knees, and* Semiramis *continues,*
I beg this favour by the blood that ſtreams

From

From my gor'd breaſt, that blood that gave you birth.
Thy hand was not conducted by thy heart.
By *Ninus*' death I real guilt incurr'd:
I now am puniſh'd. There are crimes ſo black
As to exclude all hopes of grace divine!
Ninias and *Azema* in Hymen's bands
United, ſtrive to wipe away the ſtains
Which my miſdeeds have brought upon our race.
To your expiring mother both draw nigh:
Give me your hands——may you reign happy long:
That hope ſome comfort yields; it mixes joy
With all the horrors of my cruel death.
It comes—I feel it— let *Semiramis*
Live in your memory—my ſon! my ſon!
I can no more—— [*dies.*

Oro. ——The light forſake of her eyes;
Succour your monarch, of his life take care.
By this example one great truth's reveal'd,
No crime can from the gods remain conceal'd;
Upon the great they're ever moſt ſevere;
Hear this, ye monarchs, and their juſtice fear.

FINIS.

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